THE THOREAU SOCIETY BULLETIN

Number 5 September 1943

Our BULLETIN seems to have revived with a bang. A year of silence, and now two issues in almost as many months. But this is not a regular issue. Rather it is a report of a meeting some of us had in New York City on July eighteenth. The day after this meeting the NEW YORK SUN published the following account of it in one of its editorial columns:

> "A New York member of a small society of persons interested in the philosophy of Henry David Thoreau sent out invitations to a meeting at the American Museum of Natural History. It was called for last Sunday afternoon. Who attended? A Naval Lieutenant arrived by plane from Virginia. A letter carrier and a salesman came from Philadelphia. A teacher in an engineering college came from Staten Island, two other teachers from New Jersey, as did a farmer-editor. Two advertising men, a woman novelist, a writer on natural history, a Rabbinical student were there; also a city YMCA secretary, two girls in slacks, a 'hobo philosopher' and a woman resident of a Manhattan hotel. More than two hours passed in talks on Thoreau's work and life, his meaning to modern students, his appeal as an advocate of simple living.
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> "Such a meeting, small as it was, is a slim straw in the wind. Yet the fact that in the heart of New York a public gathering was held of people who had in common nothing but an interest in the ideas of a man who died eighty-one years ago might have astonished Thoreau himself had he looked in at the door...."

Those of us who attended enjoyed it so much that we wanted to tell the rest of you about it. We talked about so many different things that it wouldn't be practical to put them all on paper. So, instead of telling you what we heard at the meeting, we decided to tell you what brought us to it -- our individual attitudes toward Thoreau, each as individual as Thoreau himself:

DANIEL BERNSTEIN, Naval Lieutenant: "Thanks to Thoreau's inspiration I found a new set of values, ambition (to farm), and even a new hobby (finding out about Thoreau, his times, and the people he has influenced."

ARTHUR CHRISTY, College Literature Professor: "My interest is in Thoreau's place in intellectual history and his debt to books, i.e. the sources of his ideas."

ANNE COLVER, Novelist: "My interest in H.D.T. was a part of an interest in the whole Concord group - out of which grew my novel. As a character, Thoreau was puzzling. He became so real that he threatened to pop into almost every chapter-and I had to keep a firm rein to hold him back from running away with the book. In other words, Henry Thoreau is an alive personality. I think that is why my interest in him rose and why it remains."

ROBERT CUMBERLAND, Engineering College Professor: I find my students interested in Thoreau "the capable and adaptable practical man, the man of keen sense perception, the man critical of the politics of his time, and the man critical of social trends."

HENRY FOLEY: "My interest is in Thoreau the individualist. I believe this side is infinitely more important in our present conditions than any back-to-the-land or back-to-nature movement. I believe that if the Society could start a campaign for individual freedom it might be the means of organizing Americans who are hungry for the old freedom of America."

WALTER HARDING, Civilian Public Service: "I study Thoreau so that I may better understand myself as a human being. He has revealed himself so completely in his Journals that he represents to me man. In his thinking he has set an ideal of intellectual freedom that has become my goal."

MRS. LILLIAN HEARST: "Farm Journal offered a prize for a best letter on farm life. Never having lived on a farm, I wrote "Farm Life as Visualized from a Hotel Window". I won the prize! Received over 100 letters from farm women. One asked for Thoreau's Walden, so I also bought a book for myself as I was ignorant of such philosophy. Since then I am a Thoreau admirer."

CLAYTON HOAGLAND, Editorial Writer: "For me Henry Thoreau will always stand above all other American political writers for his championing of individualism as opposed to the excessive authority of the State or of the mass of men over the minority and the person. But almost as strong for me is the appeal of Thoreau's advocacy of simple living for richer life. A secondary but important interest is in the poetry of his prose about nature."

IRA HOOVER, Mail Carrier: "Thoreau is woven into the web and woof of my thinking processes, because I have been reading him for more than thirty-five years. I like him for his responsive sensitiveness to the objects in the world he lived. His moral sense appeals to me, too. He never stoops to the vulgar. Friendship, to him, was a thing divine. As a literary craftsman he was an artist. He is the best Comrade I have ever known.

LEONARD KLEINFIELD, Business Man: "Thoreau was a prober - a perfectionist. His crisp, clear and concise observations not only make definite contributions to the literary age in which he lived, but enhance his reputation as a social philosopher. Perfection based on honest convictions occupied all his moments and I am grateful to him for his true interpretations."

L. LEHRMAN: "I believe that Thoreau was a rare spirit, a classical writer and an apostle to the nth degree of the principle 'Plain living and high thinking'. For this reason he has my reverence."

ROGER PAYNE, Hobo Philosopher: "My interest in Thoreau is mainly based upon his philosophy as expressed in his sayings: 'To maintain one's self on this earth is not a hardship but a pastime if we will live simply and wisely...For more than five years I have maintained myself..by working six weeks in a year."

JOHN SCOTT, Economist: "I appreciate most Thoreau's philosophy of life, based on economy, and his summary of what a philosopher is, what he feels, how he lives, His evaluation of the state and his struggle against the state appeal to me strongly. He lived poetry in a way that has touched and moved me deeply."

JOSEPH RABINOWITZ, Student: "I admire the freedom Thoreau maintained through life, not enslaving himself, and not being enslaved by the state, religion, science, or a job. He also knew himself, his mind, heart, soul, and depended upon his natural fellings for security, and not on the institution that wanted to substitute God with their opinions and laws."

MRS. E. I. WAKEFIELD: "Thoreau sought unceasingly to get down to the roots of life and things. He was gloriously and uncompromisingly revolutionary in his thinking. And above all else he preserved the perfect integrity of the soul. His significance lies in his absolute and inviolate spiritual integrity - in his purity and rectitude of mind and heart; in his life-long dedication to and service of the highest ethical values and ideals."

EDWARD WARREACHER, Salesman: "Thoreau has given me so much that is personal that my attachment is far above literary valuations. I admire not Thoreau the Naturalist, the Philosopher, the Poet - but Henry Thoreau - complete and entire."

JO ANN WHEELER, Teacher: "One whose way of life and thought cuts directly across the grain of conventional philosophy must necessarily find pleasure in the hard-bitten wisdom of Thoreau. We have many moments of despondency, even despair. For these Thoreau is a great backbone stiffener, for he did more than evolve a philosophy for himself - he lived it. He was a man of integrity and moral courage, especially worthy of respect in this present age of subservience."

Our thanks to the Museum of Natural History for the use of Room 129 for our meeting, to the contributors to this issue for taking the time to mail in their statements, and to those who underwrote this issue financially.

We are revising our mailing list and bringing it up to date. If a red check appears next to this paragraph (or if this BULLETIN had to be forwarded to you from another address) please notify DR. RAYMOND ADAMS, BOX 762, CHAPEL HILL, N.C. Otherwise your name will be dropped from the mailing list with this issue.

We'd like to publish the BULLETIN more frequently. Please help us write it by sending any Thoreau news or thoughts to Dr. Adams.

Walt Harding

Walt Harding

Daniel Bernstein

Daniel Bernstein

(For the New York Group)